

EURIPIDES
HIPPOLYTUS

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH RHYMING VERSE
WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES

BY
GILBERT MURRAY

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HIPPOLYTUS

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WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES BY

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INTRODUCTION

IN itself the *Hippolytus* needs little comment or explanation. It is a beautiful play. The harshest critics of Euripides admit its fine unity of construction, its sincere drawing of character, and its classic restraint. One might also remark on the singular skill with which the superhuman influences typified by Aphrodite and Artemis are wrought into the web of natural human action. But to the student of drama the play does present one curious problem, a problem of the relation of copies to originals, or later versions to earlier.

It has served as a model, with occasional close verbal borrowings, to two famous later tragedies, Seneca's *Phaedra* and Racine's *Phèdre*. Both plays have been greatly admired, and both show a determination to outbid their Greek original in dramatic effect. Seneca indeed may almost be said to treat it in the spirit of a modern commercial manager. "A fine plot," one can imagine him saying, "but for a modern audience it needs enlivening; it needs more invention, more incidents, stronger curtains." He sets to work to improve it.

First of all, obviously, the gods must go. A modern audience is not interested in gods. Then, Euripides has neglected the obvious *scène à faire*—Phaedra's declaration of love to Hippolytus. His hero and heroine never so much as speak to each other, and even the Nurse's proposals take place off the stage. Such propriety is surely excessive. The theatre demands a good strong Phaedra-Hippolytus scene, effectively prepared. Consequently Seneca gives us first a Nurse-Hippolytus dialogue in very general terms, the Nurse urging that young men should enjoy their youth, Hippolytus extolling chastity and the wild woods, and finally cursing all women. Phaedra, who has been eagerly

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waiting, enters in time to hear these last words and, in her despair, faints. Hippolytus catches her as she is falling, and she wakes to find herself in his arms. Situation!

From this vantage point she proceeds to woo the embarrassed and unsuspecting young man; tells of her present unhappiness, and her intense unsatisfied love for Theseus—as he once was, “young, beautiful, virginal; like you!” Hippolytus at last understands, and in fury draws his sword upon her. “Yes,” she cries: “that is how I wish to die, by your hand, in your arms. *Nunc me compotem voti facis.*” Hippolytus flings the sword away in disgust and flies to his wild woods. The Nurse, returning, finds Phaedra dumb with despair, and sees that all is lost unless . . . “*Scelere velandum est scelus.* Accuse him before he can accuse us!—Ho! Help! Help! Hippolytus has tried to ravish the Queen, and threatened her with his sword.” Attendants rush in. Curtain!

When, after the next chorus, Theseus returns—haggard and heroic from the realm of Hades—Phaedra repels him. She is unworthy to receive his embraces. She must die. “Why so?” She will not speak. “I must know,” says Theseus: “if you are obstinate I will put your Nurse to the torture.” Rather than permit that, Phaedra speaks, “I have been assaulted.” “By whom?” “I will never say; but there is his sword.” The sword is recognised. Hippolytus has fled. His guilt seems all too clear, and Theseus utters the fatal curse. In the next act, when the curse is duly fulfilled and Hippolytus slain (by a much magnified and improved sea-monster), Phaedra appears above the doorway with the sword in her hand, confesses all, and stabs herself. All first-rate theatrical stuff! Why could not Euripides have thought of it? Had he no sense of the theatre?

The curious thing is that, according to such evidence as

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we have, not very abundant but fairly decisive, he did think of this sort of thing, tried it, and then deliberately threw it away. He saw on reflection that his drama would gain by greater restraint and simplicity. And no doubt it has gained in dignity, beauty, and depth of meaning, and perhaps even in dramatic effect.

Three or four ancient writers mention an earlier version of the *Hippolytus* which was considered "unseemly" or "unsuitable" by classical Greek taste. It was called "the Veil-face Hippolytus," presumably from some stronger development of the face-veiling incident at v. 947; the present play was "the Garland Hippolytus" evidently with reference to the "wreathèd garland" in v. 87. The ancient argument of our play, for instance, says: "This is the second, or, as it is called, the 'Garland' Hippolytus. That it is a later version is clear in the text; what was unseemly and open to reproach has been corrected." The earlier play has perished except for some twenty "fragments," that is, passages stated or credibly conjectured to be quotations from it. It contained apparently, among other incidents, the scene of Phaedra's declaration of love to Hippolytus, an attack by her on Theseus for his old infidelities, and a return of Theseus not merely from "abroad," but from Hades. Presumably Seneca took the earlier Hippolytus as his model, though we may be sure that no Greek tragedy of the fifth century B.C. could possibly have risen—or fallen, or contorted itself—into the ingenious extravagances of the silver-age Roman rhetorician.

Liveliness, epigram, variety, ingenuity, richness in incident, are all good qualities in literature, but they are dangerous in tragedy and fatal to the greatest tragedy. Who would wish the Book of Job to be cleverer, or the plot of *Paradise Lost* to be made more lively and exciting? The theme of the *Hippolytus*, as it stands, is simple and eternal. There

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is such a Power as Cypris in the world; there is, much less conspicuous and violent but hardly less real, such a Power as Artemis. They do make human lives their playthings. That is what the *Hippolytus* makes us feel as we see the unconscious victims of these forces acting as they naturally would or must act.

Seneca was a consummate master of rhetoric in a period of bad taste. Racine was a great poet and dramatist in a famous period about which judgments differ. In *Phèdre* he followed Seneca's lead. He dropped the goddesses; he adopted the scene of Phaedra's declaration of love, the sword business, the infidelities of Theseus, the repentance and suicide. He further made the plot quite different and far more complex by inventing Aricie, a young princess beloved by Hippolytus, and thus adding motives of jealousy to Phaedra's other emotional complications, and, further, by developing the Hades story into a false report of Theseus' death. This report not only gives Phaedra an unexpected freedom, but also produces a political crisis with three rival claimants to the throne, Phaedra's son, Hippolytus himself, and Aricie, who belongs to an expelled branch of the royal family. The interwoven threads become irrelevant to the main theme and consequently a little tiresome. We have wandered far from the simple theme of the *Hippolytus*, the two eternal forces playing havoc with human life.

One cannot but notice also that, as with so many modern treatments of Greek stories, the cutting out of the supernatural element is incomplete and leaves behind it a sort of discord. While gods are at work behind the scenes, as in the *Hippolytus*, the Three Prayers and the mysterious Sea Bull are in their right atmosphere. When the gods are removed and our attention is concentrated on a masterly realistic picture of a somewhat morbid woman in love, we do not expect a sudden entrance of supernatural curses and

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horned dragons. There is lovely verse in *Phèdre*; there is subtle psychology; there is dramatic skill and power. Yet, to me, in coming to *Phèdre* after the *Hippolytus* there is a sense of irrecoverable loss, the loss of a quality of which Racine himself was capable and which he perhaps attained in *Athalie*.

Our evidence is not conclusive, but if we can trust it Euripides did in the second *Hippolytus* a thing so rare as to be almost unique in literature. The rule of the tradition is that a later version regularly outbids or over-elaborates the earlier. A simple example is given in one of Conington's essays. Homer says he could not name all the Greeks who went to Troy, not though he had ten tongues and ten mouths (B 486). Vergil for a similar undertaking thinks a hundred insufficient: *non mihi si linguae centum sint, oraque centum, ferrea vox* (Georgics II. V. 43). While certain later imitators are not content with a thousand. That is the normal procedure. One may see it here in Seneca and Racine, or again in Dryden's re-writing of *Shakespeare*. It is an extraordinary instance of Greek Sophrosynê in art that Euripides should actually have made his second *Hippolytus* simpler and less sensational than his first. One possible explanation suggests itself. The subject of his play pretty certainly came to Euripides from a local folk-tale attached to the sacred Tomb of Hippolytus in Trozên, a story like that of Joseph and Potiphar's wife in Genesis XXXIX, of Bellerophon and Anteia in the *Iliad* (VI. 160), of Peleus and the wife of Acastus in Pindar (Nem. IV. 57). It is a well-known type; one of those traditional tales of "brides frail and faithless" which the Chorus in the *Medea* promise to make an end of, as soon as women come by their rights (*Med.* 421 ff.). These stories are apt to have just the incidents which gave offence in the first *Hippolytus*; the woman regularly makes overtures to

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the man, is rejected by him, and then uses some garment or possession of his to back up her false accusation. It looks as if Euripides began by putting the Hippolytus story straight on to the stage, without any particular purging of its incidents. And the play somehow failed. Then he realized that what he wanted was a tragedy, and these tales in the first instance are not tragedies. They aim at entertainment, sometimes even at a snigger, rather than at tears or purgation of the soul. Hence the need of a second treatment of the subject, rejecting all that was small or mean, and concentrating on that which is great, simple, and of permanent human significance.

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

THE GODDESS APHRODITÊ.

THE GODDESS ARTEMIS.

THÊSEUS, *King of Athens and Trozên.*

PHAEDRA, *daughter of Minos, King of Crete, wife to Theseus.*

HIPPOLYTUS, *bastard son of Theseus and the Amazon Hippolytê.*

THE NURSE OF PHAEDRA.

AN OLD HUNTSMAN.

A HENCHMAN OF HIPPOLYTUS.

A CHORUS OF HUNSMEN.

A CHORUS OF TROZENIAN WOMEN, WITH THEIR LEADER.

ATTENDANTS ON THE THREE ROYAL PERSONS.

"The scene is laid in Trozên. The play was first acted when Epameinon was Archon, Olympiad 87, year 4 (429 B.C.). Euripides was first, Iophon second, Ion third."

HIPPOLYTUS

[1-21]

The scene represents the front of the royal castle of Trozên, the chief door being in the centre, facing the audience. Two statues are visible, that of ARTEMIS on the right, that of APHRODITE or CYPRIS on the left. The goddess APHRODITE is discovered alone.

APHRODITE

Great among men, and not unnamed am I,
The Cyprian, in God's inmost halls on high.
And wheresoe'er from Pontus to the far
Red West men dwell, and see the glad day-star,
And worship Me, the pious heart I bless.
And wreck that life that lives in stubbornness.
For that there is, even in a great God's mind,
That hungereth for the praise of human kind.

So runs my word; and soon the very deed
Shall follow. For this Prince of Theseus' seed,
Hippolytus, child of that dead Amazon,
And reared by saintly Pittheus in his own
Strait ways, hath dared, alone of all Trozên,
To hold me least of spirits and most mean,
And spurns my spell and seeks no woman's kiss.
But great Apollo's sister, Artemis,
He holds of all most high, gives love and praise,
And through the wild dark woods for ever strays,
He and the Maid together, with swift hounds
To slay all angry beasts from out these bounds,
To more than mortal friendship consecrate!

I grudge it not. No grudge know I, nor hate;
Yet, seeing he hath offended, I this day
Shall smite Hippolytus. Long since my way

Was opened, nor needs now much labour more.

For once from Pittheus' castle to the shore
Of Athens came Hippolytus over-seas
Seeking the vision of the Mysteries.
And Phaedra there, his father's Queen high-born,
Saw him, and, as she saw, her heart was torn
With great love, by the working of my will.
And for his sake, long since, on Pallas' hill,
Deep in the rock, that Love no more might roam,
She built a shrine, and named it *Love-at-home*:
And the rock held it, but its face alway
Seeks Trozên o'er the seas. Then came the day
When Theseus, for the blood of kinsmen shed,
Spake doom of exile on himself, and fled,
Phaedra beside him, even to this Trozên.
And here that grievous and amazed Queen,
Wounded and wondering, with ne'er a word,
Wastes slowly; and her secret none hath heard
Nor dreamed.

But never thus this love shall end!
To Theseus' ear some whisper will I send,
And all be bare! And that proud Prince, my foe,
His sire shall slay with curses. Even so
Endeth that gift that great Poseidon made
To Theseus, the three Prayers not vainly prayed.

And she, not in dishonour, yet shall die.
I would not rate this woman's pain so high
As not to pay mine haters in full fee
That vengeance that shall make all well with me.

But soft, here comes he, striding from the chase,
Our Prince Hippolytus!—I will go my ways.—
And hunters at his heels: and a loud throng
Glorying Artemis with praise and song!

Little he knows that Hell's gates opened are,
And this his last look on the great Day-star!

[APHRODITE *withdraws, unseen by HIPPOLYTUS and a band of hunters, who enter from the left, singing. They pass the Statue of APHRODITE without notice.*

HIPPOLYTUS

Follow, O follow me,
Singing on your ways
Her in whose hand are we,
Her whose own flock we be,
The Zeus-Child, the Heavenly;
To Artemis be praise!

HUNTSMEN

Hail to thee, Maiden blest,
Proudest and holiest:
God's Daughter, great in bliss,
Leto-born, Artemis!
Hail to thee, Maiden, far
Fairest of all that are,
Yea, and most high thine home,
Child of the Father's hall;
Hear, O most virginal,
Hear, O most fair of all,
In high God's golden dome.

[*The hunters have gathered about the altar of ARTEMIS. HIPPOLYTUS now advances from them, and approaches the Statue with a wreath in his hand.*

HIPPOLYTUS

To thee this wreathèd garland, from a green
And virgin meadow bear I, O my Queen,

Where never shepherd leads his grazing ewes
Nor scythe has touched. Only the river dews
Gleam, and the spring bee sings, and in the glade
Hath Solitude her mystic garden made.

No evil hand may cull it: only he
Whose heart hath known the heart of Purity,
Unlearned of man, and true whate'er befall.
Take therefore from pure hands this coronal,
O mistress loved, thy golden hair to twine.
For, sole of living men, this grace is mine,
To dwell with thee, and speak, and hear replies
Of voice divine, though none may see thine eyes.

Oh, keep me to the end in this same road!

[*An OLD HUNTSMAN, who has stood apart from the rest,
here comes up to HIPPOLYTUS.*

HUNTSMAN

My Prince—for 'Master' name I none but God—
Gave I good counsel, wouldst thou welcome it?

HIPPOLYTUS

Right gladly, friend; else were I poor of wit.

HUNTSMAN

Knowest thou one law, that through the world has won.

HIPPOLYTUS

What wouldst thou? And how runs thy law? Say on.

HUNTSMAN

It hates that Pride that speaks not all men fair!

HIPPOLYTUS

And rightly. Pride breeds hatred everywhere.

HUNTSMAN

And good words love, and grace in all men's sight?

HIPPOLYTUS

Aye, and much gain withal, for trouble slight.

HUNTSMAN

How deem'st thou of the Gods? Are they the same?

HIPPOLYTUS

Surely: we are but fashioned on their frame.

HUNTSMAN

Why then wilt thou be proud, and worship not . . .

HIPPOLYTUS

Whom? If the name be speakable, speak out!

HUNTSMAN

She stands here at thy gate: the Cyprian Queen!

HIPPOLYTUS

I greet her from afar: my life is clean.

HUNTSMAN

Clean? Nay, proud, proud; a mark for all to scan.

HIPPOLYTUS

Each mind hath its own bent, for God or man.

HUNTSMAN

God grant thee happiness . . . and wiser thought!

HIPPOLYTUS

'These Spirits that reign in darkness like me not.

HUNTSMAN

What the Gods ask, O Son, that man must pay!

HIPPOLYTUS (*turning from him to the others*)

On, huntsmen, to the Castle! Make your way
Straight to the feast room; 'tis a welcome thing
After the chase, a board of banqueting.

And see the steeds be groomed, and in array
The chariot dight. I drive them forth to-day.

[*He pauses, and makes a slight gesture of reverence to the Statue on the left. Then to the OLD HUNTSMAN.*

That for thy Cyprian, friend, and nought beside!

[HIPPOLYTUS *follows the huntsmen, who stream off by the central door into the Castle. The OLD HUNTSMAN remains.*

HUNTSMAN (*approaching the Statue and kneeling*)

O Cyprian—for a young man in his pride
I will not follow!—here before thee, meek,
In that one language that a slave may speak,
I pray thee; Oh, if some wild heart in froth
Of youth surges against thee, be not wroth
For ever! Nay, be far and hear not then:
Gods should be gentler and more wise than men!
[*He rises and follows the others into the Castle.*

The Orchestra is empty for a moment, then there enter from right and left several Trozenian women, young and old. Their number eventually amounts to fifteen.

CHORUS

There riseth a rock-born river,
Of Ocean's tribe, men say;
The crags of it gleam and quiver,
And pitchers dip in the spray:
A woman was there with raiment white
To bathe and spread in the warm sunlight,
And she told a tale to me there by the river,
The tale of the Queen and her evil day:

How, ailing beyond allayment,
Within she hath bowed her head,
And with shadow of silken raiment
The bright brown hair bespread.
For three long days she hath lain forlorn,
Her lips untainted of flesh or corn,
For that secret sorrow beyond allayment
That steers to the far sad shore of the dead.

Some Women

Is this some Spirit, O child of man?
Doth Hecat hold thee perchance, or Pan?
Doth She of the Mountains work her ban,
Or the dread Corybantes bind thee?

Others

Nay, is it sin that upon thee lies,
Sin of forgotten sacrifice,
In thine own Dictynna's sea-wild eyes?
Who in Limna here can find thee;
For the Deep's dry floor is her easy way,
And she moves in the salt wet whirl of the spray.

Other Women

Or doth the Lord of Erechtheus' race,
Thy Theseus, watch for a fairer face,
For secret arms in a silent place,
Far from thy love or chiding?

Others

Or hath there landed, amid the loud
Hum of Piraeus' sailor-crowd,
Some Cretan venturer, weary-browed,
Who bears to the Queen some tidings;
Some far home-grief, that hath bowed her low,
And chained her soul to a bed of woe?

An Older Woman

Nay—know ye not?—this burden hath alway lain
On the devious being of woman; yea, burdens twain,
The burden of Wild Will and the burden of Pain.
Through my heart once that wind of terror sped;
But I, in fear confessèd,
Cried from the dark to Her in heavenly bliss,
The Helper of Pain, the Bow-Maid Artemis:
Whose feet I praise for ever, where they tread
Far off among the blessed!

THE LEADER

But see, the Queen's grey nurse at the door,
Sad-eyed and sterner, methinks, than of yore,
With the Queen. Doth she lead her hither,
To the wind and sun?—Ah, fain would I know
What strange betiding hath blanched that brow,
And made that young life wither.

[*The NURSE comes out from the central door, followed by PHAEDRA, who is supported by two handmaids. They make ready a couch for PHAEDRA to lie upon.*

NURSE

O sick and sore are the days of men!
What wouldst thou? What shall I change again?
Here is the Sun for thee; here is the sky;
Here they weary pillows windswept lie,
 By the castle door.
But the cloud of thy brow is dark, I ween;
And soon thou wilt back to thy bower within:
So swift to change is the path of thy feet,
And near things hateful, and far things sweet;
 So was it before!

Oh, pain were better than tending pain!
For that were single, and this is twain,
With grief of heart and labour of limb.
Yet all man's life is but ailing and dim,
 And rest upon earth comes never.
But if any far-off state there be,
Dearer than life to mortality;
The hand of the Dark hath hold thereof,
And mist is under and mist above.
And so we are sick for life, and cling
On earth to this nameless and shining thing.
For other life is a fountain sealed,
And the deeps below us are unrevealed,
 And we drift on legends for ever!

[*PHAEDRA during this has been laid on her couch; she speaks to the handmaids.*

PHAEDRA

Yes; lift me: not my head so low.

There, hold my arms.—Fair arms they seem!—
My poor limbs scarce obey me now!
Take off that hood that weighs my brow,
And let my long hair stream.

NURSE

Nay, toss not, Child, so feveredly.
The sickness best will win relief
By quiet rest and constancy.
All men have grief.

PHAEDRA (*not noticing her*)

Oh for a deep and dewy spring,
With runlets cold to draw and drink!
And a great meadow blossoming,
Long-grassed, and poplars in a ring,
To rest me by the brink!

NURSE

Nay, Child! Shall strangers hear this tone
So wild, and thoughts so fever-flown?

PHAEDRA

Oh, take me to the Mountain! Oh,
Past the great pines and through the wood,
Up where the lean hounds softly go,
A-whine for wild things' blood,
And madly flies the dappled roe.
O God, to shout and speed them there,
An arrow by my chestnut hair
Drawn tight, and one keen glimmering spear—
Ah! if I could!

NURSE

What wouldst thou with them—fancies all!—
Thy hunting and thy fountain brink?
What wouldst thou? By the city wall
Canst hear our own brook plash and fall
Downhill, if thou wouldst drink.

PHAEDRA

O Mistress of the Sea-lorn Mere
Where horse-hoofs beat the sand and sing,
O Artemis that I were there
To tame Enetian steeds and steer
Swift chariots in the ring!

NURSE

Nay, mountainward but now thy hands
Yearned out, with craving for the chase;
And now toward the unseaswept sands
Thou roamest, where the coursers pace!
O wild young steed, what prophet knows
The power that holds thy curb, and throws
Thy swift heart from its race?

[At these words PHAEDRA gradually recovers herself and pays attention.]

PHAEDRA

What have I said? Woe's me! And where
Gone straying from my wholesome mind?
Hath some god caught me in his snare?
—Nurse, veil my head again, and blind
Mine eyes.—There is a tear behind
That lash.—Oh I am sick with shame!

Aye, but it hath a sting,
To come to reason; yet the name
Of madness is an awful thing.—
Could I but die in one swift flame
Unthinking, unknowing!

NURSE

I veil thy face, Child.—Would that so
Mine own were veiled for evermore,
So sore I love thee! . . . Though the lore
Of long life mocks me, and I know
How love should be a lightsome thing
Not rooted in the deep o' the heart;
With gentle ties, to twine apart
If need so call, or closer cling.—
Why do I love thee so? O fool,
O fool, the heart that bleeds for twain,
And builds, men tell us, walls of pain,
To walk by love's unswerving rule,
The same for ever, stern and true!
For 'Thorough' is no word of peace:
'Tis 'Naught-too-much' makes trouble cease,
And many a wise man bows thereto.
[*The LEADER OF THE CHORUS here approaches the NURSE.*

LEADER

Nurse of our Queen, thou watcher old and true,
We see her great affliction, but no clue
Have we to learn the sickness. Wouldst thou tell
The name and sort thereof, 'twould like us well.

NURSE

Small leechcraft have I, and she tells no man.

LEADER

Thou know'st no cause? Nor when the unrest began?

NURSE

It all comes to the same. She will not speak.

LEADER (*turning and looking at PHAEDRA*)

How she is changed and wasted! And how weak!

NURSE

'Tis the third day she hath fasted utterly.

LEADER

What, is she mad? Or doth she seek to die?

NURSE

I know not. But to death it sure must lead.

LEADER

'Tis strange. And doth her husband take no heed?

NURSE

She hides her wound, and vows that all is well.

LEADER

Can he not look into her face and tell?

NURSE

Theseus has been abroad these many days.

LEADER

Canst thou not force her then? Or think of ways
To trap the secret of the sick heart's pain?

NURSE

Have I not tried all ways, and all in vain?
Yet will I cease not now, and thou shalt tell
If in her grief I serve my mistress well!

[*She goes across to where PHAEDRA lies; and presently, while speaking, kneels by her.*

Dear daughter mine, all that before was said

Let both of us forget; and thou instead

Be kindlier, and unlock that prisoned brow.

And I, who followed then the wrong road, now

Will leave it and be wiser. If thou fear

Some secret sickness, there be women here

To give thee comfort. [PHAEDRA shakes her head.

No; not secret? Then

Is it a sickness meet for aid of men?

Speak, that a leech may tend thee.

Silent still!

Nay, Child, what profits silence? If 'tis ill

This that I counsel, make me see the wrong:

If well, then yield to me.

Nay, Child, I long

For one kind word, one look!

[PHAEDRA lies motionless. The NURSE rises.

Oh, woe is me!

Women, we labour here all fruitlessly,

All as far off as ever from her heart.

She is still the same, all silent and apart,

Not hearing me. [Turning to PHAEDRA again

Nay, hear thou shalt, and be,

If so thou will, more wild than the wild sea;

But know, thou art thy little ones' betrayer!

If thou die now, shall child of thine be heir

To Theseus' castle? Nay, not thine, I ween,

But hers! That barbèd Amazonian Queen

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HIPPOLYTUS

Hath left a child to bend thy children low,
A bastard royal-hearted—sayst not so?—
Hippolytus . . .

PHAEDRA

Ah!

[She starts up, sitting, and throws the veil off.]

NURSE

That stings thee?

PHAEDRA

Nurse, most sore
Thou hast hurt me! In God's name, speak that name no
more.

NURSE

Thou seest? Thy mind is clear; but with thy mind
Thou wilt not save thy children, nor be kind
To thine own life.

PHAEDRA

My children? Nay, most dear
I love them.—Far, far other grief is here.

NURSE *(after a pause, wondering)*

Thy hand is clean, O Child, from stain of blood?

PHAEDRA

My hand is clean; but is my heart, O God?

NURSE

Some enemy's spell hath made thy spirit dim?

PHAEDRA

He hates me not that slays me, nor I him.

NURSE

Theseus, the King, hath wronged thee in man's wise?

PHAEDRA

Ah, could but I stand guiltless in his eyes!

NURSE

O speak! What is this death-fraught mystery?

PHAEDRA

Nay, leave me to my wrong. I wrong not thee.

NURSE (*suddenly throwing herself in supplication at*

PHAEDRA's feet)

Not wrong me, whom thou wouldst all desolate leave!

PHAEDRA (*rising and trying to move away*)

What wouldst thou? Force me? Clinging to my sleeve?

NURSE

Yea, to thy knees; and weep; and let not go!

PHAEDRA

Woe to thee, Woman, if thou learn it, woe!

NURSE

I know no bitterer woe than losing thee.

PHAEDRA

I am lost! Yet the deed shall honour me.

NURSE

Why hide what honours thee? 'Tis all I claim!

PHAEDRA

Why, so I build up honour out of shame!

NURSE

Then speak, and higher still thy fame shall stand.

PHAEDRA

Go, in God's name!—Nay, leave me; loose my hand!

NURSE

Never, until thou grant me what I pray.

PHAEDRA (*yielding, after a pause*)

So be it. I dare not tear that hand away.

NURSE (*rising and releasing PHAEDRA*)

Tell all thou wilt, Daughter I speak no more.

PHAEDRA (*after a long pause*)

Mother, poor Mother, that didst love so sore!

NURSE

What mean'st thou, Child? The Wild Bull of the Tide?

PHAEDRA

And thou, sad sister, Dionysus' bride!

NURSE

Child! wouldst thou shame the house where thou wast born?

PHAEDRA

And I the third, sinking most all-forlorn!

NURSE (*to herself*).

I am all lost and feared. What will she say?

PHAEDRA

From there my grief comes, not from yesterday.

NURSE

I come no nearer to thy parable.

PHAEDRA

Oh, would that thou couldst tell what I must tell!

NURSE

I am no seer in things I wot not of.

PHAEDRA (*again hesitating*)

What is it that they mean, who say men . . . love?

NURSE

A thing most sweet, my Child, yet dolorous.

PHAEDRA

Only the half, belike, hath fallen on us!

NURSE (*starting*)

On thee? Love?—Oh, what sayst thou? What man's son?

PHAEDRA

What man's? There was a Queen, an Amazon . . .

NURSE

Hippolytus, sayst thou?

PHAEDRA (*again wrapping her face in the veil*)

Nay, 'twas thou, not I!

[PHAEDRA *sinks back on the couch and covers her face again.*

The NURSE starts violently from her and walks up and down.

NURSE

O God! what wilt thou say, Child? Wouldst thou try
To kill me?—Oh, 'tis more than I can bear;
Women, I will no more of it, this glare
Of hated day, this shining of the sky.
I will fling down my body, and let it lie
Till life be gone!

Women, God rest with you,
My works are over! For the pure and true
Are forced to evil, against their own heart's vow,
And love it!

[*She suddenly sees the Statue of CYPRIUS, and stands with her eyes riveted upon it.*

Ah, Cyprian! No god art thou,
But more than god, and greater, that hath thrust
Me and my queen and all our house to dust!

[*She throws herself on the ground close to the statue.*

CHORUS

Some Women

O Women, have ye heard? Nay, dare ye hear
The desolate cry of the young Queen's misery?

A Woman

My Queen, I love thee dear,
Yet liefer were I dead than framed like thee.

Others

Woe, woe to me for this thy bitter bane,
Surely the food man feeds upon is pain!

Others

How wilt thou bear thee through this livelong day,
Lost, and thine evil naked to the light?

Strange things are close upon us—who shall say

How strange?—save one thing that is plain to sight,
The stroke of the Cyprian and the fall thereof
On thee, thou child of the Isle of fearful Love!

[PHAEDRA *during this has risen from the couch and comes forward collectedly. As she speaks the NURSE gradually rouses herself and listens more calmly.*

PHAEDRA

O Women, dwellers in this portal-seat
Of Pelops' land, gazing towards my Crete,
How oft, in other days than these, have I
Through night's long hours thought of man's misery,
And how this life is wrecked! And, to mine eyes,
Not in man's knowledge, not in wisdom, lies
The lack that makes for sorrow. Nay, we scan
And know the right—for wit hath many a man—
But will not to the last end strive and serve.
For some grow too soon weary, and some swerve
To other paths, setting before the Right
The diverse far-off image of Delight;
And many are delights beneath the sun!
Long hours of converse; and to sit alone
Musing—a deadly happiness!—and Shame:
Though two things there be hidden in one name,
And Shame can be slow poison if it will!

This is the truth I saw then, and see still;

Nor is there any magic that can stain
 That white truth for me, or make me blind again.
 Come, I will show thee how my spirit hath moved.
 When the first stab came, and I knew I loved,
 I cast about how best to face mine ill.
 And the first thought that came, was to be still
 And hide the sickness.—For no trust there is
 In man's tongue, that so well admonishes
 And counsels and betrays, and waxes fat
 With griefs of its own gathering!—After that
 I would my madness bravely bear, and try
 To conquer by mine own heart's purity.

My third mind, when these two availed me naught
 To quell love, was to die—

[*Motion of protest among the Women.*

the best, best, thought

Of all—gainsay me not!—for such as me.
 I would not hide my praise for none to see;
 Why should I have my shame before men's eyes
 Kept living? And I knew, in deadly wise,
 Shame was the deed and shame the suffering;
 And I a woman, too, to face the thing,
 Despised of all!

Oh, utterly accurst

Be she of women, whoso dared the first
 To cast her honour out to a strange man!
 'Twas in some great house, surely, that began
 This plague upon us; then the baser kind,
 When the good led towards evil, followed blind
 And joyous! Cursed be they whose lips are clean
 And wise and seemly, but their hearts within
 Rank with bad daring! How can they, O Thou
 That walkest on the waves, great Cyprian, how

Smile in their husband's faces, and not fall,
Not cower before the Darkness that knows all,
Aye, dread the dead still chambers, lest one day
The stones find voice, and all be finished!

Nay,

Friends, 'tis for this I die; lest I stand there
Having shamed my husband and the babes I bare.
In ancient Athens they shall some day dwell,
My babes, free men, free-spoken, honourable,
And when one asks their mother, proud of me!
For, oh, it cows a man, though bold he be,
To know a mother's or a father's sin.

'Tis written, one way is there, one, to win
This life's race, could man keep it from his birth,
A true clean spirit. And through all this earth
To every false man, that hour comes apace
When Time holds up a mirror to his face,
And girl-like, marvelling, there he stares to see
How foul his heart! Be it not so with me!

LEADER OF CHORUS

Ah God, how sweet is virtue, and how wise,
And honour its due meed in all men's eyes!

NURSE (*who has now risen and recovered herself*)

Mistress, a sharp swift terror struck me low
A moment since, hearing of this thy woe.
But now—I was a coward! And men say
Our second thoughts are wiser every way.

This is no monstrous thing; no grief too dire
To meet with quiet thinking. In her ire
A perilous goddess hath swept down on thee.
Thou lovest. Is that so strange? Many there be

Beside thee! . . . And because thou lovest, wilt fall
And die! And must all lovers die, then? All
That are or shall be? A blithe law for them!
Nay, when in might she swoops, no strength can stem
Cypris; and if man yields him, she is sweet;
But is he proud and stubborn? From his feet
She lifts him, and—how think you?—flings to scorn!

She ranges with the stars of eve and morn,
She wanders in the heaving of the sea,
And all life livèd from her.—Aye, this is she
That sows Love's seed and brings Love's fruit to birth;
And great Love's brethren are all we on earth!

Nay, they who con grey books of ancient days
Or dwell among the Muses, tell—and praise—
How Zeus himself once yearned for Semelê;
How maiden Eôs in her radiancy
Swept Kephalos to heaven away, away,
For sore love's sake. And there they dwell, men say,
And fear not, fret not; for a thing too stern,
Meeting, hath crushed them!

And must thou, then, turn
And struggle? Sprang there from thy father's blood
Thy little soul all lonely? Or the god
That rules thee, is he other than our gods?

Nay, yield thee to men's ways, and kiss their rods!
How many, deem'st thou, of men good and wise,
Know their own home's blot, and avert their eyes?
How many fathers, when a son has strayed
And toiled beneath the Cyprian, bring him aid,
Not chiding? And man's wisdom e'er hath been
To keep what is not good to see, unseen!

A straight and perfect life is not for man;
Nay, in a shut house, let him, if he can,

'Mid sheltered rooms, make all lines true. But here,
Out in the wide sea fallen, and full of fear,
Hopedst thou so easily to swim to land?

Canst thou but set thine ill days on one hand
And more good days on the other, verily,
O child of woman, life is well with thee!

[*She pauses, and then draws nearer to PHAEDRA.*

Nay, dear my daughter, cease thine evil mind,
Cease thy fierce pride! For pride it is, and blind,
To seek to outpass gods!—Love on and dare:
A god hath willed it! But since pain is there,
Make the pain sleep! Songs are there to bring calm,
And magic words. And I shall find the balm,
Be sure, to heal thee. Else in sore dismay
Were men, could not we women find our way!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Help is there, Queen, in all this woman says,
To ease thy suffering. But 'tis thee I praise;
Albeit that praise is harder to thine ear
Than all her chiding was, and bitterer!

PHAEDRA

Oh, this it is hath flung to dogs and birds
Men's lives and homes and cities—fair false words!
Oh, why speak things to please our ears? We crave
Not that. 'Tis honour, honour, we must save;

NURSE

Why prate so proud? 'Tis no words, brave nor base,
Thou cravest; 'tis a man's arms!

[*PHAEDRA moves indignantly.*

Up and face

The truth of what thou art, and name it straight!
Were not thy life thrown open here for Fate
To beat on; hadst thou been a woman pure
Or wise or strong; never had I for lure
Of joy nor heartache led thee on to this!
But when a whole life one great battle is,
To win or lose—no man can blame me then.

PHAEDRA

Shame on thee! Lock those lips, and ne'er again
Let word nor thought so foul have harbour there!

NURSE

Foul, if thou wilt: but better than the fair
For thee and me. And better, too, the deed
Behind them, if it save thee in thy need,
Than that word Honour thou wilt die to win!

PHAEDRA

Nay, in God's name,—such wisdom and such sin
Are all about thy lips!—urge me no more.
For all the soul within me is wrought o'er
By Love; and if thou speak and speak, I may
Be spent, and drift where now I shrink away.

NURSE

Well, if thou wilt!—'Twere best never to err,
But, having erred, to take a counsellor
Is second.—Mark me now. I have within
Love-philtres, to make peace where storm hath been,
That, with no shame, no scathe of mind, shall save
Thy life from anguish; wilt but thou be brave!
[To herself reflecting.]

Ah, but from him, the well-beloved, some sign
 We need, or word, or raiment's hem, to twine
 Amid the charm, and one spell knit from twain.

PHAEDRA

Is it a potion or a salve? Be plain.

NURSE

Who knows? Seek to be helped, Child, not to know.

PHAEDRA

Why art thou ever subtle? I dread thee, so

NURSE

Thou wouldst dread everything!—What dost thou dread?

PHAEDRA

Lest to his ear some word be whisperèd

NURSE

Let be, Child! I will make all well with thee!

—Only do thou, O Cyprian of the Sea,

Be with me! And mine own heart, come what may,
 Shall know what ear to seek, what word to say!

[*The NURSE having spoken these last words in prayer apart
 to the Statue of CYPRIUS turns back and goes into the house.*

*PHAEDRA sits pensive again on her couch till towards the
 end of the following Song, when she rises and bends close
 to the door.*

CHORUS

Erôs, Erôs, who blindest, tear by tear,

Men's eyes with hunger; thou swift Foe, that
 pliest

Deep in our hearts joy like an edged spear;

Come not to me with Evil haunting near,
Wrath on the wind, nor jarring of the clear
Wing's music as thou fliest!
There is no shaft that burneth, not in fire,
Not in wild stars, far off and flinging fear,
As in thine hands the shaft of All Desire,
Erôs, Child of the Highest!

In vain, in vain, by old Alpheüs' shore
The blood of many bulls doth stain the river,
And all Greece bows on Phœbus' Pythian floor;
Yet bring we to the Master of Man no store
The Keybearer, who standeth at the door
Close-barred, where hideth ever
The heart of the shrine. Yea, though he sack man's
life
Like a sacked city, and moveth evermore
Girt with calamity and strange ways of strife,
Him have we worshipped never!

There roamed a Steed in Oecalia's wild,
A Maid without yoke, without Master,
And Love she knew not, that far King's child:
But he came, he came, with a song in the night,
With fire, with blood; and she strove in flight,
A Torrent Spirit, a Maenad white,
Faster and vainly faster,
Sealed unto Heracles by the Cyprian's Might.
Alas, thou Bride of Disaster!

O Mouth of Dirce, O god-built wall,
That Dirce's wells run under,
Ye know the Cyprian's fleet footfall!

Ye saw the heaven's around her flare,
When she lulled to her sleep that Mother fair
Of Twy-born Bacchus, and decked her there
The Bride of the bladed Thunder.

For her breath is on all that hath life, and she floats in
the air,

Bee-like, death-like, a wonder.

[*During the last lines PHAEDRA has approached the door
and is listening*

PHAEDRA

Silence; ye Women! Something is amiss.

LEADER

How? In the house?—Phaedra, what fear is this?

PHAEDRA

Let me but listen! There are voices. Hark!

LEADER

I hold my peace: yet is thy presage dark.

PHAEDRA

Oh, misery!

O God, that such a thing should fall on me!

LEADER

What sound, what word,

O Woman, Friend, makes that sharp terror start
Out at thy lips? What ominous cry half-heard
Hath leapt upon thine heart?

PHAEDRA

I am undone!—Bend to the door and hark,
Hark what a tone sounds there, and sinks away!

LEADER

Thou art beside the bars. 'Tis thine to mark
The castle's floating message. Say, Oh, say
What thing hath come to thee?

PHAEDRA (*calmly*)

Why, what thing should it be?
The son of that proud Amazon speaks again
In bitter wrath: speaks to my handmaiden!

LEADER

I hear a noise of voices, nothing clear.
For thee the din hath words, as through barred locks
Floating, at thy heart it knocks.

PHAEDRA

"Pander of Sin" it says.—Now canst thou hear?—
And there: "Betrayed of a master's bed."

LEADER

Ah me, betrayed! Betrayed!
Sweet Princess, thou art ill bested,
Thy secret brought to light, and ruin near,
By her thou heldest dear,
By her that should have loved thee and obeyed!

PHAEDRA

Aye, I am slain. She thought to help my fall
With love instead of honour, and wrecked all.

LEADER

Where wilt thou turn thee, where?
And what help seek, O wounded to despair?

PHAEDRA

I know not, save one thing, to die right soon.

For such as me God keeps no other boon.

[*The door in the centre bursts open, and HIPPOLYTUS comes forth, closely followed by the NURSE PHAEDRA cowers aside.*]

HIPPOLYTUS

O Mother Earth, O Sun that makest clean,
What poison have I heard, what speechless sin!

NURSE

Hush, O my Prince, lest others mark, and guess . . .

HIPPOLYTUS

I have heard horrors! Shall I hold my peace?

NURSE

Yea, by this fair right arm, Son, by thy pledge . . .

HIPPOLYTUS

Down with that hand! Touch not my garment's edge!

NURSE

Oh, by thy knees, be silent or I die!

HIPPOLYTUS

Why, when thy speech was all so guiltless? Why?

NURSE

It is not meet, fair Son, for every ear!

HIPPOLYTUS

Good words can bravely forth, and have no fear.

NURSE

Thine oath, thine oath! I took thine oath before!

HIPPOLYTUS

'Twas but my tongue, 'twas not my soul that swore.

NURSE

O Son, what wilt thou? Wilt thou slay thy kin?

HIPPOLYTUS

I own no kindred with the spawn of sin!

[He flings her from him.]

NURSE

Nay, spare me! Man was born to err; oh, spare!

HIPPOLYTUS

O God, why hast Thou made this gleaming snare,
Woman, to dog us on the happy earth?
Was it Thy will to make Man, why his birth
Through Love and Woman? Could we not have rolled
Our store of prayer and offering, royal gold,
Silver and weight of bronze before Thy feet,
And bought of God new child-souls, as were meet
For each man's sacrifice, and dwelt in homes
Free, where nor Love nor Woman goes and comes?

How, is that daughter not a bane confessed,
Whom her own sire sends forth—(He knows her best!)—
And, will some man but take her, pays a dower!
And he, poor fool, takes home the poison-flower;
Laughs to hang jewels on the deadly thing
He joys in; labours for her robe-wearing,
Till wealth and peace are dead. He smarts the less
In whose high seat is set a Nothingness,

A woman naught availing. Worst of all
The wise deep-thoughted! Never in my hall
May she sit throned who thinks and waits and sighs!
For Cypris breeds most evil in the wise,
And least in her whose heart has naught within;
For puny wit can work but puny sin.

Why do we let their handmaids pass the gate?
Wild beasts were best, voiceless and fanged, to wait
About their rooms, that they might speak with none,
Nor ever hear one answering human tone!
But now dark women in still chambers lay
Plans that creep out into the light of day
On handmaids' lips—

[Turning to the NURSE]

As thine accursèd head
Braved the high honour of my Father's bed,
And came to traffic. . . . Our white torrent's spray
Shall drench mine ears to wash those words away!
And couldst thou dream that *I* . . . ? I feel impure
Still at the very hearing! Know for sure,
Woman, naught but mine honour saves ye both.
Hadst thou not trapped me with that guileful oath,
No power had held me secret till the King
Knew all! But now, while he is journeying,
I too will go my ways and make no sound.
And when he comes again, I shall be found
Beside him, silent, watching with what grace
Thou and thy mistress greet him face to face!
Then shall I have the taste of it, and know
What woman's guile is.—Woe upon you, woe!
How can I too much hate you, while the ill
Ye work upon the world grows deadlier still?
Too much? Make woman pure, and wild Love tame,
Or let me cry for ever on their shame!

[He goes off in fury to the left. PHAEDRA still cowering in her place begins to sob.]

PHAEDRA

Sad, sad and evil-starred

Is Woman's state.

What shelter now is left or guard?

What spell to loose the iron knot of fate?

And this thing, O my God,

O thou sweet Sunlight, is but my desert!

I cannot fly before the avenging rod

Falls, cannot hide my hurt.

What help, O ye who love me, can come near,

What god or man appear,

To aid a thing so evil and so lost?

Lost, for this anguish presses, soon or late,

To that swift river that no life hath crossed.

No woman ever lived so desolate!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah me, the time for deeds is gone; the boast

Proved vain that spake thine handmaid; and all lost!

[At these words PHAEDRA suddenly remembers the NURSE, who is cowering silently where HIPPOLYTUS had thrown her from him. She turns upon her.]

PHAEDRA

O wicked, wicked, wicked! Murderess heart

To them that loved thee! Hast thou played thy part?

Am I enough trod down?

May Zeus, my sire,

Blast and uproot thee! Stab thee dead with fire!

Said I not—Knew I not thine heart?—to name

To no one soul this that is now my shame?

And thou couldst not be silent! So no more
I die in honour. But enough; a store
Of new words must be spoke and new things thought.
This man's whole being to one blade is wrought
Of rage against me. Even now he speeds
To abase me to the King with thy misdeeds;
Tell Pittheus; fill the land with talk of sin!

Cursèd be thou, and whoso else leaps in
To bring bad aid to friends that want it not.
[*The NURSE has raised herself, and faces PHAEDRA, down-
cast but calm*

NURSE

Mistress, thou blamest me; and all thy lot
So bitter sore is, and the sting so wild,
I bear with all. Yet, if I would, my Child,
I have mine answer, couldst thou hearken aught
I nursed thee, and I love thee; and I sought
Only some balm to heal thy deep despair,
And found—not what I sought for. Else I were
Wise, and thy friend, and good, had all sped right.
So fares it with us all in the world's sight.

PHAEDRA

First stab me to the heart, then humour me
With words! 'Tis fair; 'tis all as it should be!

NURSE

We talk too long, Child. I did ill; but, oh,
There is a way to save thee, even so!

PHAEDRA

A way? No more ways! One way hast thou trod
Already, foul and false and loathed of god!

Begone out of my sight; and ponder how
Thine own life stands! I need no helpers now.

[She turns from the NURSE who creeps abashed away into the Castle.]

Only do ye, high Daughters of Trozên,
Let all ye hear be as it had not been;
Know naught, and speak of naught! 'Tis my last prayer

LEADER

By God's pure daughter, Artemis, I swear,
No word will I of these thy griefs reveal!

PHAEDRA

'Tis well. But now, yea, even while I reel
And falter, one poor hope, as hope now is,
I clutch at in this coil of miseries;
To save some honour for my children's sake;
Yea, for myself some fragment, though things break
In ruin around me. Nay, I will not shame
The old proud Cretan castle whence I came,
I will not cower before King Theseus' eyes,
Abased, for want of one life's sacrifice!

LEADER

What wilt thou? Some dire deed beyond recall?

PHAEDRA (*musing*)

Die; but how die?

LEADER

Let not such wild words fall!

PHAEDRA (*turning upon her*)

Give thou not such light counsel! Let me be
To sate the Cyprian that is murdering me!

To-day shall be her day; and, all strife past,
Her bitter Love shall quell me at the last.

Yet, dying, shall I die another's bane!
He shall not stand so proud where I have lain
Bent in the dust! Oh, he shall stoop to share
The life I live in, and learn mercy there!
[She goes off wildly into the Castle.]

CHORUS

Could I take me to some cavern for mine hiding,
In the hill-tops where the Sun scarce hath trod;
Or a cloud make the home of mine abiding,
As a bird among the bird-droves of God!
Could I wing me to my rest amid the roar
Of the deep Adriatic on the shore,
Where the waters of Eridanus are clear,
And Phaëthon's sad sisters by his grave
Weep into the river, and each tear
Gleams, a drop of amber, in the wave.

To the strand of the Daughters of the Sunset,
The Apple-tree, the singing and the gold;
Where the mariner must stay him from his onset,
And the red wave is tranquil as of old;
Yea, beyond that Pillar of the End
That Atlas guardeth, would I wend;
Where a voice of living waters never ceaseth
In God's quiet garden by the sea,
And Earth, the ancient life-giver, increaseth
Joy among the meadows, like a tree.

O shallop of Crete, whose milk-white wing
Through the swell and the storm-beating,

'Bore us thy Prince's daughter,
Was it well she came from a joyous home
To a far King's bridal across the foam?

What joy hath her bridal brought her?
Sure some spell upon either hand
Flew with thee from the Cretan strand,
Seeking Athena's tower divine;
And there, where Munychus fronts the brine,
Crept by the shore-flung cables' line,
The curse from the Cretan water!

And, for that dark spell that about her clings,
Sick desires of forbidden things

The soul of her rend and sever;
The bitter tide of calamity
Hath risen above her lips; and she,

Where bends she her last endeavour?
She will hie her alone to her bridal room,
And a rope swing slow in the rafters' gloom;
And a fair white neck shall creep to the noose,
A-shudder with dread, yet firm to choose
The one strait way for fame, and lose

The Love and the pain for ever.

[*The Voice of the NURSE is heard from within, crying, at first inarticulately, then clearly.*

VOICE

Help ho! The Queen! Help, whoso hearkeneth!
Help! Theseus' spouse caught in a noose of death!

A WOMAN

God, is it so soon finished? That bright head
Swinging beneath the rafters! Phaedra dead!

VOICE

O haste! This knot about her throat is made
So fast! Will no one bring me a swift blade?

A WOMAN

Say, friends, what think ye? Should we haste within,
And from her own hand's knotting loose the Queen?

ANOTHER

Nay, are there not men there? 'Tis an ill road
In life, to finger at another's load.

VOICE

Let it lie straight! Alas! the cold white thing
That guards his empty castle for the King!

A WOMAN

Ah! 'Let it lie straight!' Heard ye what she said?
No need for helpers now; the Queen is dead!

[The Women intent upon the voices from the Castle, have not noticed the approach of THESEUS. He enters from the left; his dress and the garland on his head show that he has returned from some oracle or special abode of a God. He stands for a moment perplexed.]

THESEUS

Ho, Women, and what means this loud acclaim
Within the house? The vassals' outcry came
To smite mine ears far off. It were more meet
To fling out wide the Castle gates, and greet
With joy a herald from God's Presence!

[The confusion and horror of the Women's faces gradually affects him. A dirge-cry comes from the Castle]

How?

Not Pittheus? Hath Time struck that hoary brow?
Old is he, old, I know. But sore it were.

Returning thus, to find his empty chair!

[The Women hesitate; then the Leader comes forward.]

LEADER

O Theseus, not on any old man's head
This stroke falls Young and tender is the dead.

THESEUS

Ye Gods! One of my children torn from me?

LEADER

Thy motherless children live, most grievously.

THESEUS

How sayst thou? What? My wife? . . .

Say how she died.

LEADER

In a high death-knot that her own hands tied.

THESEUS

A fit of the old cold anguish—Tell me all—

That held her? Or did some fresh thing befall?

LEADER

We know no more. But now arrived we be,
Theseus, to mourn for thy calamity.

[THESEUS stays for a moment silent, and puts his hand to his brow. He notices the wreath.]

THESEUS

What? And all garlanded I come to her
With flowers, most evil-starred God's-messenger!

Ho, varlets, loose the portal bars; undo
The bolts; and let me see the bitter view
Of her whose death hath brought me to mine own.

*[The great central door of the Castle is thrown open wide and
the body of PHAEDRA is seen lying on a bier, surrounded
by a group of Handmaids, wailing.]*

THE HANDMAIDS

Ah me, what thou hast suffered and hast done:

A deed to wrap this roof in flame!

Why was thine hand so strong, thine heart so bold?

Wherefore, O dead in anger, dead in shame,

The long, long wrestling ere thy breath was cold?

O ill-starred Wife,

What brought this blackness over all thy life?

[A throng of Men and Women has gradually collected.]

THESEUS

Ah me, this is the last

—Hear, O my countrymen!—and bitterest

Of Theseus' labours! Fortune all unblest,

How hath thine heavy heel across me passed!

Is it the stain of sins done long ago,

Some fell God still remembereth,

That must so dim and fret my life with death?

I cannot win to shore; and the waves flow

Above mine eyes, to be surmounted not.

Ah wife, sweet wife, what name

Can fit thine heavy lot?

Gone like a wild bird, like a blowing flame,

In one swift gust, where all things are forgot!

Alas! this misery!
 Sure 'tis some stroke of God's great anger rolled
 From age to age on me,
 For some dire sin wrought by dim kings of old.

LEADER

Sire, this great grief hath come to many an one,
 A true wife lost. Thou art not all alone

THESEUS

Deep, deep beneath the Earth
 Dark may my dwelling be,
 And Night my heart's one comrade, in the dearth,
 O Love, of thy most sweet society.
 This is my death, O Phaedra, more than thine.
[He turns suddenly on the Attendants.
 Speak who speak can? What was it? What malign
 Swift stroke, O heart discounselled, leapt on thee?
[He bends over PHAEDRA; then as no one speaks, looks
fiercely up.
 What, will ye speak? Or are they dumb as death,
 This herd of thralls my high house harboureth?
[There is no answer. He bends again over PHAEDRA.
 Ah me, why shouldst thou die?
 A wide and royal grief I here behold,
 Not to be borne in peace, not to be told.
 As a lost man am I.
 My children motherless and my house undone,
 Since thou art vanished quite,
 Purest of hearts that e'er the wandering Sun
 Touched, or the star-eyed splendour of the Night
[He throws himself beside the body.

CHORUS

Unhappy one, O most unhappy one;

With what strange evil is this Castle vexed!
Mine eyes are molten with the tears that run

For thee and thine; but what thing follows next?

I tremble when I think thereon!

[*They have noticed that there is a tablet with writing fastened to the dead woman's wrist. THESEUS also sees it.*]

THESEUS

Ha, what is this that hangs from her dear hand?

A tablet! It would make me understand

Some dying wish, some charge about her bed

And children. 'Twas the last prayer, ere her head

Was bowed for ever [Taking the tablet.

Fear not, my lost bride,

No woman born shall lie at Theseus' side,

Nor rule in Theseus' house!

A seal! Ah, see

How her gold signet here looks up at me,

Trustfully. Let me tear this thread away,

And read what tale the tablet seeks to say.

[*He proceeds to undo and read the tablet The Chorus breaks into horrified groups.*]

SOME WOMEN

Woe, woe! God brings to birth

A new grief here, close on the other's tread!

My life hath lost its worth.

May all go now with what is finished!

The castle of my King is overthrown,

A house no more, a house vanished and gone!

OTHER WOMEN

O God, if it may be in any way,
 Let not this house be wrecked! Help us who pray!
 I know not what is here: some unseen thing
 That shows the Bird of Evil on the wing.
 [THESEUS *has read the tablet and breaks out in uncontrollable emotion*

THESEUS

Oh, horror piled on horror!—Here is writ . . .
 Nay, who could bear it, who could speak of it?

LEADER

What, O my King? If I may hear it, speak!

THESEUS

Doth not the tablet cry aloud, yea, shriek,
 Things not to be forgotten?—Oh, to fly
 And hide mine head! No more a man am I.
 Ah, God, what ghastly music echoes here!

LEADER

How wild thy voice! Some terrible thing is near

THESEUS

No; my lips' gates will hold it back no more;
 This deadly word,
 That struggles on the brink and will not o'er,
 Yet will not stay unheard.
 [*He raises his hand, to make proclamation to all present.*

Ho, hearken all this land!

[*The people gather expectantly about him.*
 Hippolytus by violence hath laid hand
 On this my wife, forgetting God's great eye.
 [*Murmurs of amazement and horror; THESEUS, apparently calm, raises both arms to heaven.*

Therefore, O Thou my Father, hear my cry,
Poseidon! Thou didst grant me for mine own
Three prayers; for one of these, slay now my son,
Hippolytus; let him not outlive this day,
If true thy promise was! Lo, thus I pray.

LEADER

Oh, call that wild prayer back! O King, take heed!
I know that thou wilt live to rue this deed.

THESEUS

It may not be.—And more, I cast him out
From all my realms. He shall be held about
By two great dooms. Or by Poseidon's breath
He shall fall swiftly to the house of Death;
Or wandering, outcast, o'er strange land and sea,
Shall live and drain the cup of misery.

LEADER

Ah, see! here comes he at the point of need.
Shake off that evil mood, O King: have heed
For all thine house and folk.—Great Theseus, hear!
[THESEUS stands silent in fierce gloom. HIPPOLYTUS comes
in from the right.]

HIPPOLYTUS

Father, I heard thy cry, and sped in fear
To help thee.—But I see not yet the cause
That racked thee so.—Say, Father, what it was.
[The murmurs in the crowd the silent gloom of his Father,
and the horror of the Chorus-women gradually work on
HIPPOLYTUS and bewilder him. He catches sight of
the bier.]

Ah, what is that! Nay, Father, not the Queen Dead! (*Murmurs in the crowd.*)

'Tis most strange. 'Tis passing strange, I ween.
'Twas here I left her. Scarce an hour hath run
Since here she stood and looked on this same sun.
What is it with her? Wherefore did she die?
[THESEUS remains silent. The murmurs increase.
Father, to thee I speak. Oh, tell me, why,
Why art thou silent? What doth silence know
Of skill to stem the bitter flood of woe?
And human hearts in sorrow crave the more
For knowledge, though the knowledge grieve them sore
It is not love, to veil thy sorrows in
From one most near to thee, and more than kin.

THESEUS (*to himself*)

Fond race of men, so striving and so blind,
Ten thousand arts and wisdoms can ye find,
Desiring all and all imagining:
But ne'er have reached nor understood one thing,
To make a true heart there where no heart is!

HIPPOLYTUS

That were indeed beyond man's mysteries,
To make a false heart true against his will.
But why this subtle talk? It likes me ill,
Father; thy speech runs wild beneath this blow.

THESEUS (*as before*)

O would that God had given us here below
Some test of love, some sifting of the soul,
To tell the false and true! Or through the whole
Of men two voices ran, one true and right,
The other as chance willed it; that we might

Convict the liar by the true man's tone,
And not live duped forever, every one!

HIPPOLYTUS (*misunderstanding him; then guessing at
something of the truth*)

What? Hath some friend proved false?

Or in thine ear

Whispered some slander? Stand I tainted here,
Though utterly innocent? [*Murmurs from the crowd.*

Yea, dazed am I;

'Tis thy words daze me, falling all awry,
Away from reason, by fell fancies vexed!

THESEUS

O heart of man, what height wilt venture next?
What end comes to thy daring and thy crime?
For if with each man's life 'twill higher climb,
And every age break out in blood and lies
Beyond its fathers, must not God devise
Some new world far from ours, to hold therein
Such brood of all unfaithfulness and sin?

Look, all, upon this man, my son, his life
Sprung forth from mine! He hath defiled my wife;
And standeth here convicted by the dead,
A most black villain!

[HIPPOLYTUS *falls back with a cry and covers his face with
his robe.*

Nay, hide not thine head!

Pollution, is it? Thee it will not stain
Look up, and face thy Father's eyes again!

Thou friend of Gods, of all mankind elect;
Thou the pure heart, by thoughts of ill unflecked!
I care not for thy boasts. I am not mad,
To deem that Gods love best the base and bad.

Now is thy day! Now vaunt thee; thou so pure,
No flesh of life may pass thy lips! Now lure
Fools after thee; call Orpheus King and Lord;
Make ecstasies and wonders! Thumb thine hoard
Of ancient scrolls and ghostly mysteries—
Now thou art caught and known!

Shun men like these,

I charge ye all! With solemn words they chase
Their prey, and in their hearts plot foul disgrace.

My wife is dead.—‘Ha, so that saves thee now?’
That is what grips thee worst, thou caitiff, thou!
What oaths, what subtle words, shall stronger be
Than this dead hand, to clear the guilt from thee?

‘She hated thee,’ thou sayest; ‘the bastard born
Is ever sore and bitter as a thorn
To the true brood.’—A sorry bargainer
In the ills and goods of life thou makest her,
If all her best-beloved she cast away
To wreak blind hate on thee!—What, wilt thou say,
‘Through every woman’s nature one blind strand
Of passion winds, that men scarce understand?’—
Are we so different? Know I not the fire
And perilous flood of a young man’s desire,
Desperate as any woman, and as blind,
When Cypris stings? Save that the man behind
Has all men’s strength to aid him. Nay, ’twas thou...

But what avail to wrangle with thee now,
When the dead speaks for all to understand,
A perfect witness!

Hie thee from this land

To exile with all speed. Come never more
To god-built Athens, not to the utmost shore
Of any realm where Theseus’ arm is strong!
What? Shall I bow my head beneath this wrong,

And cower to thee? Not Isthmian Sinis so
Will bear men witness that I laid him low,
Nor Skiron's rocks, that share the salt sea's prey,
Grant that my hand hath weight vile things to slay!

LEADER

Alas! whom shall I call of mortal men
Happy? The highest are cast down again

HIPPOLYTUS

Father, the hot strained fury of thy heart
Is terrible. Yet, albeit so swift thou art
Of speech, if all this matter were laid bare,
Speech were not then so swift; nay, nor so fair. . . .
[Murmurs again in the crowd.]

I have no skill before a crowd to tell
My thoughts. 'Twere best with few, that know me well.—
Nay, that is natural; tongues that sound but rude
In wise men's ears, speak to the multitude
With music.

None the less, since there is come
This stroke upon me, I must not be dumb,
But speak perforce. . . . And there will I begin
Where thou beganst, as though to strip my sin
Naked, and I not speak a word!

Dost see
This sunlight and this earth? I swear to thee
There dwelleth not in these one man—deny
What lists thee!—cleaner of this crime than I.

Two things I have learned to know; God's worship first,
Next to win friends about me, few, that thirst
To hold them clean of all unrighteousness;
For whom 'twere shame to proffer sin, nor less

With tolerance base to smooth the sinner's way.
How could I dupe the men whom day by day
I live with? They have proved me to the end,
Near and far off the same, who call me friend.
And most in that one thing, where now thy mesh
Would grip me, stainless quite! No woman's flesh
Hath e'er this body touched. Of all such deed
Naught wot I, save what things a man may read
In pictures or hear spoke; nor am I fain,
Being virgin-souled, to read or hear again,

So be it! My strict life has no worth for thee,
But show at least what hath corrupted me.
Was that poor flesh so passing fair, beyond
All women's loveliness?

Was I some fond
False plotter, that I schemed to win through her
Thy castle's heirdom? Fond indeed I were!
Nay, a stark madman! 'But a crown,' thou sayst,
'Usurped, is sweet.' Nay, rather most unblest
To all wise-hearted; sweet to fools and them
Whose eyes are blinded by the diadem.
In contests of all valour fain would I
Lead Hellas; but in rank and majesty
Not lead, but be at ease, with good men near
To love me, free to work and not to fear.
That brings more joy than any crown or throne.

[*He sees from the demeanour of THESEUS and of the crowd
that his words are not winning them, but rather making
them bitterer than before. It comes to his lips to speak the
whole truth.*]

I have said my say; save one thing . . . one alone.

O had I here some witness in my need,
As I was witness! Could she hear me plead,

Face me and face the sunlight; well I know,
Our deeds would search us out for thee, and show
Who lies!

But now, I swear—so hear me both,
The Earth beneath and Zeus who Guards the Oath—
I never touched this woman that was thine!
No words could win me to it, nor incline
My heart to dream it. May God strike me down,
Nameless and fameless, without home or town,
An outcast and a wanderer of the world;
May my dead bones rest never, but be hurled
From sea to land, from land to angry sea,
If evil is my heart and false to thee!
[He waits a moment; but sees that his Father is unmoved.]

The truth again comes to his lips.

If 'twas some fear that made her cast away
Her life . . . I know not. More I must not say.
Right hath she done when in her was no right;
And Right I follow to mine own despite!

LEADER

It is enough! God's name is witness large,
And thy great oath, to assoil thee of this charge

THESEUS

Is not the man a juggler and a mage,
Cool wits and one right oath—what more?—to assuage
Sin and the wrath of injured fatherhood!

HIPPOLYTUS

Am I so cool? Nay, Father, 'tis thy mood
That makes me marvel! By my faith, wert thou
The son, and I the sire; and deemed I now

In very truth thou hadst my wife assailed,
I had not exiled thee, nor stood and railed,
But lifted once mine arm, and struck thee dead!

THESEUS

Thou gentle judge! Thou shalt not so be sped
To simple death, nor by thine own decree.
Swift death is bliss to men in misery.
Far off, friendless forever, thou shalt drain
Amid strange cities the last dregs of pain!

HIPPOLYTUS

Wilt verily cast me now beyond thy pale,
Not wait for Time, the lifter of the veil?

THESEUS

Aye, if I could, past Pontus, and the red
Atlantic marge! So do I hate thine head.

HIPPOLYTUS

Wilt weigh nor oath nor faith nor prophet's word
To prove me? Drive me from thy sight unheard?

THESEUS

This tablet here, that needs no prophet's lot
To speak from, tells me all. I ponder not
Thy fowls that fly above us! Let them fly.

HIPPOLYTUS

O ye great Gods, wherefore unlock not I
My lips, ere yet ye have slain me utterly,
Ye whom I love most? No. It may not be!
The one heart that I need I ne'er should gain
To trust me. I should break mine oath in vain.

THESEUS

Death! but he chokes me with his saintly tone!—
Up, get thee from this land! Begone! Begone!

HIPPOLYTUS

Where shall I turn me? Think. To what friend's door
Betake me, banished on a charge so sore?

THESEUS

Whoso delights to welcome to his hall
Vile ravishers . . . to guard his hearth withal!

HIPPOLYTUS

Thou seekst my heart, my tears? Aye, let it be
Thus! I am vile to all men, and to thee!

THESEUS

There was a time for tears and thought; the time
Ere thou didst up and gird thee to thy crime.

HIPPOLYTUS

Ye stones, will ye not speak? Ye castle walls!
Bear witness if I be so vile, so false!

THESEUS

Aye, fly to voiceless witnesses! Yet here
A dumb deed speaks against thee, and speaks clear!

HIPPOLYTUS

Alas!

Would I could stand and watch this thing, and see
My face, and weep for very pity of me!

THESEUS

Full of thyself, as ever! Not a thought
For them that gave thee birth; nay, they are naught!

HIPPOLYTUS

O my wronged Mother! O my birth of shame!
May none I love e'er bear a bastard's name!

THESEUS (*in a sudden blaze of rage*)

Up, thralls, and drag him from my presence! What?
'Tis but a foreign felon! Heard ye not?
[*The thralls still hesitate in spite of his fury.*]

HIPPOLYTUS

They touch me at their peril! Thine own hand
Lift, if thou canst, to drive me from the land.

THESEUS

That will I straight, unless my will be done!

[HIPPOLYTUS *comes close to him and kneels.*]

Nay! Not for thee my pity! Get thee gone!

[HIPPOLYTUS *rises, makes a sign of submission, and slowly moves away.* THESEUS *as soon as he sees him going turns rapidly and enters the Castle. The door is closed again.* HIPPOLYTUS *has stopped for a moment before the Statue of ARTEMIS, and, as THESEUS departs, breaks out in prayer.*

HIPPOLYTUS

So; it is done! O dark and miserable!

I see it all, but see not how to tell

The tale.—O thou belovèd, Leto's Maid,
Chase-comrade, fellow-rester in the glade,

Lo, I am driven with a caitiff's brand
Forth from great Athens! Fare ye well, O land
And city of old Erechtheus! Thou, Trozên,
What riches of glad youth mine eyes have seen
In thy broad plain! Farewell! This is the end;
The last word, the last look!

Come, every friend
And fellow of my youth that still may stay,
Give me god-speed and cheer me on my way.
Ne'er shall ye see a man more pure of spot
Than me, though mine own Father loves me not!

[HIPPOLYTUS goes away to the right followed by many Huntsmen and other young men. The rest of the crowd has by this time dispersed except the Women of the Chorus and some Men of the Chorus of Huntsmen.]

CHORUS

Men

Surely the thought of the Gods hath balm in it alway, to
win me

Far from my griefs; and a thought, deep in the dark
of my mind,

Clings to a great Understanding. Yet all the spirit
withir me

Faints, when I watch men's deeds matched with the
guerdon they find.

For Good comes in Evil's traces,
And the Evil the Good replaces;
And Life, 'mid the changing faces,
Wandereth weak and blind.

Women

What wilt thou grant me, O God? Lo, this is the prayer
of my travail—

Some well-being; and chance not very bitter thereby;
A Spirit uncrippled by pain; and a mind not deep to unravel
Truth unseen, nor yet dark with the brand of a lie.

With a veering mood to borrow

Its light from every morrow,

Fair friends and no deep sorrow,

Well could man live and die!

Men

Yet my spirit is no more clean,

And the web of my hope is torn,

For the deed of wrong that mine eyes have seen,

The lie and the rage and the scorn;

A Star among men, yea, a Star

That in Hellas was bright,

By a Father's wrath driven far

To the wilds and the night.

Oh, alas for the sands of the shore!

Alas for the brakes of the hill,

Where the wolves shall fear thee no more,

And thy cry to Dictynna is still!

Women

No more in the yoke of thy car

Shall the colts of Enetia fleet;

Nor Limma's echoes quiver afar

To the clatter of galloping feet.

The sleepless music of old,

That leaped in the lyre,

Ceaseth now, and is cold,

In the halls of thy sire.

The bowers are discrowned and unladen

Where Artemis lay on the lea;

And the love-dream of many a maiden

Lost, in the losing of thee.

A Maiden

And I, even I,
For thy fall, O Friend,
Amid tears and tears,
Endure to the end
Of the empty years,
Of a life run dry.
In vain didst thou bear him,
Thou Mother forlorn!
Ye Gods that did snare him,
Lo, I cast in your faces
My hate and my scorn!
Ye love-linkèd Graces,
(Alas for the day!)
Was he naught, then, to you,
That ye cast him away,
The stainless and true,
From the old happy places?

LEADER

Look yonder! Surely from the Prince 'tis one
That cometh, full of haste and woe-begone.
[A HENCHMAN *enters in haste.*

HENCHMAN

Ye women, whither shall I go to seek
King Theseus? Is he in this dwelling? Speak!

LEADER

Lo, where he cometh through the Castle gate!
[THESEUS *comes out from the Castle.*

HENCHMAN

O King, I bear thee tidings of dire weight
To thee, aye, and to every man, I ween,
From Athens to the marches of Trozên.

THESEUS

What? Some new stroke hath touched, unknown to me,
The sister cities of my sovrantry?

HENCHMAN

Hippolytus is . . . Nay, not dead; but stark
Outstretched, a hairsbreadth this side of the dark.

THESEUS (*as though unmoved*)

How slain? Was there some other man, whose wife
He had like mine defiled, that sought his life?

HENCHMAN

His own wild team destroyed him, and the dire
Curse of thy lips.

The boon of thy great Sire
Is granted thee, O King, and thy son slain.

THESEUS

Ye Gods! And thou, Poseidon! Not in vain
I called thee Father; thou hast heard my prayer!

How did he die? Speak on. How closed the snare
Of Heaven to slay the shamer of my blood?

HENCHMAN

'Twas by the bank of beating sea we stood,
We thralls and decked the steeds, and combed each mane;
Weeping; for word had come that ne'er again

The foot of our Hippolytus should roam
This land, but waste in exile by thy doom.

So stood we till he came, and in his tone
No music now save sorrow's, like our own,
And in his train a concourse without end
Of many a chase-fellow and many a friend.
At last he brushed his sobs away, and spake:
'Why this fond loitering? I would not break
My Father's law.—Ho, there! My coursers four
And chariot, quick! This land is mine no more.'

Thereat, be sure, each man of us made speed.
Swifter than speech we brought them up, each steed
Well dight and shining, at our Prince's side.
He grasped the reins upon the rail: one stride
And there he stood, a perfect charioteer,
Each foot in its own station set. Then clear
His voice rose, and his arms to heaven were spread:
'O Zeus, if I be false, strike thou me dead!
But, dead or living, let my Father see
One day, how falsely he hath hated me!'

Even as he spake, he lifted up the goad
And smote; and the steeds sprang. And down the road
We henchmen followed, hard beside the rein,
Each hand, to speed him, toward the Argive plain
And Epidaurus.

So we made our way
Up toward the desert region, where the bay
Curls to a promontory near the verge
Of our Trozên, facing the southward surge
Of Saron's gulf. Just there an angry sound,
Slow-swelling, like God's thunder underground,
Broke on us, and we trembled. And the steeds
Pricked their ears skyward, and threw back their heads.

And wonder came on all men, and affright,
Whence rose that awful voice. And swift our sight
Turned seaward, down the salt and roaring sand.

And there, above the horizon, seemed to stand
A wave unearthly, crested in the sky;
Till Skiron's Cape first vanished from mine eye,
Then sank the Isthmus hidden, then the rock
Of Epidaurus. Then it broke, one shock
And roar of gasping sea and spray flung far,
And shoreward swept, where stood the Prince's car.

Three lines of wave together raced, and, full
In the white crest of them, a wild Sea-Bull
Flung to the shore, a fell and marvellous Thing.
The whole land held his voice, and answering
Roared in each echo. And all we, gazing there,
Gazed seeing not; 'twas more than eyes could bear,

Then straight upon the team wild terror fell.
Howbeit, the Prince, cool-eyed and knowing well
Each changing mood a horse has, gripped the reins
Hard in both hands; then as an oarsman strains
Up from his bench, so strained he on the thong,
Back in the chariot swinging. But the young
Wild steeds bit hard the curb, and fled afar;
Nor rein nor guiding hand nor morticed car
Stayed them at all. For when he veered them round,
And aimed their flying feet to grassy ground,
In front uprose that Thing, and turned again
The four great coursers, terror-mad. But when
Their blind rage drove them toward the rocky places,
Silent, and ever nearer to the traces,
It followed, rockward, till one wheel-edge grazed.

The chariot tript and flew, and all was mazed
In turmoil. Up went wheel-box with a din,
Where the rock jagged, and nave and axle-pin.

And there—the long reins round him—there was he
Dragging, entangled irretrievably.

A dear head battering at the chariot side,
Sharp rocks, and ripped flesh, and a voice that cried:
'Stay, stay, O ye who fattened at my stalls,
Dash me not into nothing!—O thou false
Curse of my Father!—Help! Help, whoso can,
An innocent, innocent and stainless man!'

Many there were that laboured then, I wot,
To bear him succour, but could reach him not,
Till—who knows how?—at last the tangled rein
Unclassed him, and he fell, some little vein
Of life still pulsing in him

All beside,

The steeds, the hornèd Horror of the Tide,
Had vanished—who knows where?—in that wild land

O King, I am a bondsman of thine hand;
Yet love nor fear nor duty me shall win
To say thine innocent son hath died in sin.
All women born may hang themselves, for me,
And swing their dying words from every tree
On Ida! For I know that he was true!

LEADER

O God, so cometh new disaster, new
Despair! And no escape from what must be!

THESEUS

Hate of the man thus stricken lifted me
At first to joy at hearing of thy tale;
But now, some shame before the Gods, some pale
Pity for mine own blood, hath o'er me come.
I laugh not, neither weep, at this fell doom.

HENCHMAN

How then? Behoves it bear him here, or how
Best do thy pleasure?—Speak, Lord. Yet if thou
Wilt mark at all my word, thou wilt not be
Fierce-hearted to thy child in misery.

THESEUS

Aye, bring him hither. Let me see the face
Of him who durst deny my deep disgrace
And his own sin; yea, speak with him, and prove
His clear guilt by God's judgments from above.

[*The HENCHMAN departs to fetch HIPPOLYTUS; THESEUS sits waiting in stern gloom while the CHORUS sing. At the close of their song a Divine Figure is seen approaching on a cloud in the air and the voice of ARTEMIS speaks.*

CHORUS

Thou comest to bend the pride
Of the hearts of God and man,
Cypris; and by thy side,
In earth-encircling span,
He of the changing plumes,
The Wing that the world illumines,
As over the leagues of land flies he,
Over the salt and sounding sea.

For mad is the heart of Love,
And gold the gleam of his wing;
And all to the spell thereof
Bend, when he makes his spring;
All life that is wild and young
In mountain and wave and stream,
All that of earth is sprung,
Or breathes in the red sunbeam;

Yea, and Mankind. O'er all a royal throne,
Cyprian, Cyprian, is thine alone!

A VOICE FROM THE CLOUD

O thou that rulest in Aegeus' Hall,
I charge thee, hearken!

Yea, it is I,
Artemis, Virgin of God most High.
Thou bitter King, art thou glad withal
For thy murdered son?
For thine ear bent low to a lying Queen,
For thine heart so swift amid things unseen?
Lo, all may see what end thou hast won!
Go, sink thine head in the waste abyss;
Or aloft to another world than this,
Birdwise with wings,
Fly far to thine hiding,
Far over this blood that clots and clings;
For in righteous men and in holy things
No rest is thine nor abiding!

[The cloud has become stationary in the air.]

Hear, Theseus, all the story of thy grief!
Verily, I bring but anguish, not relief;
Yet, 'twas for this I came, to show how high
And clean was thy son's heart, that he may die
Honoured of men; aye, and to tell no less
The frenzy, or in some sort the nobleness,
Of thy dead wife. One Spirit there is, whom we
That know the joy of white virginity,
Most hate in heaven. She sent her fire to run
In Phaedra's veins, so that she loved thy son.
Yet strove she long with love, and in the stress
Fell not, till by her Nurse's craftiness

Betrayed, who stole, with oaths of secrecy,
To entreat thy son. And he, most righteously,
Nor did her will, nor, when thy railing scorn
Beat on him, broke the oath that he had sworn,
For God's sake. And thy Phaedra, panic-eyed,
Wrote a false writ, and slew thy son, and died,
Lying; but thou wast nimble to believe!

[THESEUS, *at first bewildered then dumbfounded now utters a deep groan.*

It stings thee, Theseus?—Nay, hear on, and grieve
Yet sorer. Wottest thou three prayers were thine
Of sure fulfilment, from thy Sire divine?

Hast thou no foes about thee, then, that one—
Thou vile King!—must be turned against thy son?
The deed was thine. Thy Sea-born Sire but heard
The call of prayer, and bowed him to his word.
But thou in his eyes and in mine art found
Evil, who wouldst not think, nor probe, nor sound
The deeps of prophet's lore, nor day by day
Leave Time to search; but, swifter than man may,
Let loose the curse to slay thine innocent son!

THESEUS

O Goddess, let me die!

ARTEMIS

Nay; thou hast done
A heavy wrong; yet even beyond this ill
Abides for thee forgiveness. 'Twas the will
Of Cypris that these evil things should be,
Sating her wrath. And this immutably
Hath Zeus ordained in heaven: no God may thwart
A God's fixed will; we grieve but stand apart,

Else, but for fear of the Great Father's blame,
Never had I to such extreme of shame
Bowed me, be sure, as here to stand and see
Slain him I loved best of mortality!

Thy fault, O King, its ignorance sunders wide
From very wickedness; and she who died
By death the more disarmed thee, making dumb
The voice of question. And the storm has come
Most bitterly of all on thee! Yet I
Have mine own sorrow, too. When good men die,
There is no joy in heaven, albeit our ire.
On child and house of the evil falls like fire.
[*A throng is seen approaching; HIPPOLYTUS enters supported by his attendants.*

CHORUS

Lo, it is he! The bright young head
Yet upright there!
Ah, the torn flesh and the blood-stained hair;
Alas for the kindred's trouble!
It falls as fire from a God's hand sped,
Two deaths, and mourning double.

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah, pain, pain, pain!
O unrighteous curse! O unrighteous sire!
No hope.—My head is stabbed with fire,
And a leaping spasm about my brain.
Stay, let me rest. I can no more.
O fell, fell steeds that my own hand fed,
Have ye maimed me and slain, that loved me of yore?
—Soft there, ye thralls! No trembling hands
As ye lift me, now!—Who is that that stands

At the right?—Now firm, and with measured tread,
 Lift one accursèd and stricken sore
 By a father's sinning.

Thou, Zeus, dost see me? Yea, it is I;
 The proud and pure, the server of God,
 The white and shining in sanctity!
 To a visible death, to an open sod,
 I walk my ways;
 And all the labour of saintly days
 Lost, lost, without meaning!

Ah God, it crawls
 This agony, over me!
 Let be, ye thralls!
 Come, Death, and cover me;
 Come, O thou Healer blest!

But a little more,
 And my soul is clear,
 And the anguish o'er!
 Oh, a spear, a spear!
 To rend my soul to its rest!

Oh, strange, false Curse! Was there some blood-stained
 head,
 Some father of my line, unpunishèd,
 Whose guilt lived in his kin,
 And passed, and slept, till after this long day
 It lights. . . . Oh, why on me? Me, far away
 And innocent of sin?

O words that cannot save!

When will this breathing end in that last deep
Pain that is painlessness? 'Tis sleep I crave.

When wilt thou bring me sleep,
Thou dark and midnight magic of the grave!

ARTEMIS

Sore-stricken man, bethink thee in this stress,
Thou dost but die for thine own nobleness.

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah!

O breath of heavenly fragrance! Though my pain
Burns, I can feel thee and find rest again.
The Goddess Artemis is with me here.

ARTEMIS

With thee and loving thee, poor sufferer!

HIPPOLYTUS

Dost see me, Mistress, nearing my last sleep?

ARTEMIS

Aye, and would weep for thee, if Gods could weep.

HIPPOLYTUS

Who now shall hunt with thee or hold thy quiver?

ARTEMIS

He dies; but my love cleaves to him for ever

HIPPOLYTUS

Who guide thy chariot, keep thy shrine-flowers fresh?

ARTEMIS

The accursèd Cyprian caught him in her mesh!

HIPPOLYTUS

The Cyprian? Now I see it!—Aye, 'twas she.

ARTEMIS

She missed her worship, loathed thy chastity!

HIPPOLYTUS

Three lives by her one hand! 'Tis all clear now.

ARTEMIS

Yea, three; thy father and his Queen and thou.

HIPPOLYTUS

My father; yea, he too is pitiable!

ARTEMIS

A plotting Goddess tripped him, and he fell.

HIPPOLYTUS

Father, where art thou? . . . Oh, thou sufferest sore!

THESEUS.

Even unto death, child. There is joy no more.

HIPPOLYTUS

I pity thee in this coil; aye, more than me.

THESEUS

Would I could lie there dead instead of thee!

HIPPOLYTUS

Oh, bitter bounty of Poseidon's love!

THESEUS

Would God my lips had never breathed thereof!

HIPPOLYTUS (*gently*)

Nay, thine own rage had slain me then, some wise!

THESEUS

A lying spirit had made blind mine eyes!

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah me!

Would that a mortal's curse could reach to God!

ARTEMIS

Let be! For not, though deep beneath the sod
Thou liest, not unrequited nor unsung
Shall this fell stroke, from Cypris' rancour sprung,
Quell thee, mine own, the saintly and the true!

My hand shall win its vengeance, through and through
Piercing with flawless shaft what heart soe'er
Of all men living is most dear to Her.
Yea, and to thee, for this sore travail's sake,
Honours most high in Trozên will I make;
For yokeless maids before their bridal night
Shall shear for thee their tresses; and a rite
Of honouring tears be thine in ceaseless store;
And virgins' thoughts in music evermore
Turn toward thee, and praise thee in the Song
Of Phaedra's far-famed love and thy great wrong.

O seed of ancient Aegeus, bend thee now
And clasp thy son. Aye, hold and fear not thou!
Not knowingly hast thou slain him; and man's way,
When Gods send error, needs must fall astray.

And thou, Hippolytus, shrink not from the King,
Thy father. Thou wast born to bear this thing.

Farewell! I may not watch man's fleeting breath,
Nor stain mine eyes with the effluence of death.
And sure that Terror now is very near.
[The cloud slowly rises and floats away.]

HIPPOLYTUS

Farewell, farewell, most Blessèd! Lift thee clear
Of soiling men! Thou wilt not grieve in heaven
For my long love! . . . Father, thou art forgiven.
It was Her will. I am not wroth with thee. . . .
I have obeyed Her all my days! . . .

Ah me,
The dark is drawing down upon mine eyes;
It hath me! . . . Father! . . . Hold me! Help me rise!

THESEUS (*supporting him in his arms*)
Ah, woe! How dost thou torture me, my son!

HIPPOLYTUS

I see the Great Gates opening. I am gone.

THESEUS

Gone? And my hand red-reeking from this thing!

HIPPOLYTUS

Nay, nay; thou art assoiled of manslaying.

THESEUS

Thou leav'st me clear of murder? Sayst thou so?

HIPPOLYTUS

Yea, by the Virgin of the Stainless Bow!

THESEUS

Dear Son! Ah, now I see thy nobleness!

HIPPOLYTUS

Pray that a true-born child may fill my place.

THESEUS

Ah me, thy righteous and godfearing heart!

HIPPOLYTUS

Farewell;

A long farewell, dear Father, ere we part!

[THESEUS *bends down and embraces him passionately.*

THESEUS

Not yet!—O hope and bear while thou hast breath!

HIPPOLYTUS

Lo, I have borne my burden. This is death. . . .

Quick, Father; lay the mantle on my face.

[THESEUS *covers his face with a mantle and rises.*

THESEUS

Ye bounds of Pallas and of Pelops' race,

What greatness have ye lost!

Woe, woe is me!

Thou Cyprian, long shall I remember thee!

CHORUS

On all this folk, both low and high,
A grief hath fallen beyond men's fears.
There cometh a throbbing of many tears,
A sound as of waters falling.
For when great men die,
A mighty name and a bitter cry
Rise up from a nation calling.

[They move into the Castle, carrying the body of HIPPOLYTUS.]

NOTES ON THE HIPPOLYTUS

Prologue.—'The Aphrodite of Euripides' actual belief, if one may venture to dogmatise on such a subject, was almost certainly not what we should call a goddess, but rather a Force of Nature, or a Spirit working in the world. To deny her existence you would have to say not merely, "There is no such person," but "There is no such thing;" and such a denial would be a defiance of obvious facts. It is in this sense that it is possible to speak of Hippolytus as "sinning against Aphrodite."

For the purposes of drama, of course, this "thing" must be made into a person, and even represented in human form according to the current conceptions of mythology. And, once personified, she becomes, like most of the Olympians in Euripides, certainly hateful and perhaps definitely evil, though still far removed from the degraded, ultra-feminine goddess of Ovid and the handbooks of mythology. In this prologue she retains much of the impersonal grandeur of a Force of Nature. The words "I grudge it not: no grudge know I, nor hate," are doubtless intended to be true.

P. 13, l. 11', *Pittheus*.—Father of Aethra, who was Theseus' mother. Formerly King of Trozên, now ending his days in a life of meditation.

P. 14, ll. 31 ff., *She built a shrine*.—An obscure passage, in which I follow the suggestion of Dr. Verrall (*Class. Rev.* xv. 449). Euripides is evidently giving an account of the origin of a sanctuary of Aphrodite Pandêmos on the Acropolis, which in his day was known as 'Αφροδίτη ἐπὶ Ἰππολύτῳ, i.e. (as at least, he imagined) "Aphrodite for Hippolytus," or "with a view to Hippolytus." Phaedra,

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he says, 'built this shrine *because of, thinking of*, Hippolytus—i.e. seeking to exorcise her passion for him, and to fix her errant love at home as she fixed the shrine in the rock. She perhaps—so Dr. Verrall suggests—called it Aphrodite Endêmos, "Love-at-home" or "in-the-land." When her plan failed, and it appeared that Love will not be fixed down in one place, the name was changed to Pandêmos, "of-all-lands." Of course it is not certain, nor even very probable, that either Πάνδημος or ἐπὶ Ἴππολύτῳ originally bore the meaning that Euripides and his contemporaries attached to them. Ἐπὶ Ἴππολύτῳ, for instance, is quite likely, in its original form, to have meant "the shrine at the place where horses are unyoked."

P. 15, l. 73, *From a green and virgin meadow*.—There are long discussions in the ancient Greek commentators, whether this meadow is real or allegorical. Is it only the garland of his adoration from the meadow of his virgin soul? "It seems odd," says one of them, "to have a meadow which you are not allowed to enter until you can show that your good qualities do not come from education!" Doubtless it is a real sacred meadow.

P. 17, ll. 99, 103.—In two lines, "Then why wilt thou be proud?" and "Clean? Nay, proud," I follow my own published text, reading σεμνὸς for σεμνήν and σεμνή.

P. 19, l. 121, *Of Ocean's tribes*.—The river Ocean was, by some accounts, the father of all fresh and pure water.

P. 19, ll. 142, 143, *Hecate . . . Pan . . . the Corybantes*.—These powers all produced seizures, terrors, and ecstasies. Dictynna (often a mere alternative name for Artemis) was, strictly speaking, a Cretan sea-goddess—cf. δίκτυον, "a net"—a hunter of the sea as Artemis is a hunter of the land. (She is identified with Artemis on p. 67.) She can catch

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Phaëdra in Limna, the "Mere" in the neighbourhood of Trozên, because Limna is a dried-up lagoon that was once part of the sea, and therefore belongs to the sea powers.

P. 20, l. 151, *Erechtheus*.—An old king of Athens.

P. 21, ll. 193, 194, *This nameless and shining thing*.—Reading τοῦ δ' ὅτι τοῦτο στίλβει . . . δυσέρωτες.

P. 23, l. 228, *The Sea-lorn Mere*.—The dried lagoon, Limna, near Trozên, used for chariot races. The "un-seaswept sands," just below, are the same.

P. 24, ll. 264, 265.—"Thorough" and "Naught too much" were mottoes of two of the legendary Seven Wise Men.

P. 25, l. 281, *Has been abroad*.—Apparently to an oracle (see below). Perhaps there was a definite tradition saying where he had gone and why, but if so, it is lost. A modern playwright would, of course, fill in these details, for the sake of verisimilitude; the ancient playwright intentionally omits them as irrelevant, just as he omits to give proper names to his Nurses, Messengers, and Leaders of the Chorus.

P. 28, l. 325, *What wouldst thou? Force me*.—It was of the nature of sin to reject a suppliant, i.e. a person who threw himself entirely upon your mercy, and implored you. The repugnance that an ordinary person has to such a rejection was felt by the Greeks in a religious way. The ultimate sanction, if you did harden your heart, would be twofold: first, the gods would have a natural repulsion against one who formally and knowingly refused to be merciful; secondly, the suppliant might do what the Nurse threatens to do here, and stay immovable till he died of

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hunger or exposure—and his death would lie at the door of his rejector!

P. 29, ll. 337–341, *Mother, poor Mother, that didst love so sore*.—Phaedra thinks of the general wreck of her house through love. Her mother, Pasiphaë, wife of Minos, loved the pirate or adventurer Tauros (“The Bull”), was cast into prison by her husband, and there starved herself to death. Her sister, Ariadnê, had loved Theseus; he saved her from her father’s vengeance, but by command of the gods left her on the lonely island of Naxos, where the god Dionysus came and carried her away. (In the original myth Tauros was the Cretan Bull God.)

P. 32, l. 372, *The Isle of awful Love*.—Crete, because of Pasiphaë, Ariadnê, Aëropê, the wife of Thyestes, and other heroines of terrible love-stories.

P. 32, l. 373, *O Women, dwellers in this portal seat*.—This wonderful passage is very characteristic of Euripides—a subtle and beautiful study of character expressed in a formal, self-analysing speech. The “delights” that have tempted and undone her are, first, the pleasure of long talks—with Hippolytus, or about him; next, the pleasure of losing herself in dreams; and thirdly, in some sense not precisely explained, but surely not difficult to understand, a feeling of shame or cowardice. She feels that if only she had had more courage all might have been well! Why this “shame,” this yielding to fear, strikes her at this moment as a “delight,” is not explained; but it does not seem to me unnatural.

P. 34, l. 433, *Mistress, a sharp, swift terror*, etc.—This speech of the Nurse, so beautiful and so full of sophistries, is typically the kind of thing that caused Euripides to be accused of immoral writing.

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P. 37, l. 478, *Love-philtres*.—The situation at the end of this scene seems to be this: The Nurse goes in to prepare a magic charm *which shall cure Phaedra of her love*, but mentions that, in order to prepare it, she must get something belonging to Hippolytus to weave into the charm. (Either a material object to be actually woven into the charm, or a word, to be ceremonially caught and woven in—a common device in magic.) Phaedra suspects that she means to speak to Hippolytus, and the Nurse's next words rather confirm her suspicions; but, broken and weary as she is, she has not strength or keenness of mind enough to make sure and to prevent her doing so. A large part of her nature, no doubt, longs to have Hippolytus told, and succeeds at this critical moment in lulling to sleep her exhausted will and conscience.

P. 39, ll. 545–564, *Chorus*.—The second strophe and antistrophe (“On Oechalian hills, etc.”), are rather obscure. The connection of thought is: “Think of the terrible things that have befallen through love! How Iolê, daughter of Eurytus, suffered, when the angry love of Heracles made him burn her father's house in Oechalia, and carry her off amid flames and blood. And how Semelê, the mother of Bacchus, suffered in Thebes by the waters of Dirce, when Zeus came to her in a blaze of lightning, and his love was her death.”

P. 43, l. 612, *'Twas but my tongue, 'twas not my soul that swore*.—A line constantly misrepresented and attacked (see on *Frogs*, l. 101, p. 112). In reality Hippolytus faces death rather than break the oath that he was trapped into.

P. 43, l. 616, *O God, why hast thou made this gleaming snare*.—The fury of this speech, while not unnatural to the youthful saintliness of Hippolytus, is intentionally made

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bitter and offensive by the playwright, so as to throw our sympathies for the time entirely on the side of Phaedra. We hate Hippolytus, and can for the moment sympathise with, or at least understand, her terrible act of blind self-preservation and revenge.

P. 46, l. 690, *He speeds to abase me to the King*.—He had definitely said that he would not do so; but she felt his hatred, she had no reason to trust him, she had just been betrayed by one much closer to her, and probably she had hardly even noticed the actual words in his torrent of rage.

P. 47, l. 712, *Know naught and speak of naught*.—This oath of the Chorus is important for the sequel of the play. It prevents them from saving Hippolytus.

P. 48, l. 732, *Could I take me to some cavern for mine hiding*.—This lovely song seems to me a good instance of the artistic value of the Greek chorus. The last scene has been tragic to the point of painfulness; the one thing that can heal the pain without spoiling the interest is an outburst of pure poetry. And the sentiment of this song, the longing to escape to a realm, if not of happiness, at least of beautiful sadness, is so magically right.

Phaëthon, who tried to drive the chariot of the Sun and fell, was buried by the river Eridanus (afterwards identified with the Po). His sisters wept over his grave, and their tears turned to drops of amber.

P. 48, l. 742, *The apple-tree, the singing and the gold*.—The Garden of the Hesperides, or Daughters of the Sunset, was in the West, near the Pillars of Heracles, which marked the utmost limit to which man might travel. The apple-tree bore golden apples, and it was here that Zeus walked in the garden and first met his bride, Hera.

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P. 49, l. 756, *Sure some spell upon either hand.*—A curse or spell must have come with her from Crete. It was difficult for a curse to come from one country to another. Exactly like infection, it had to be somehow carried. The women suggest that it came with Phaedra in the ship, and then, when the ship was moored in Munychia, the old harbour of Athens, it crawled up the cables to the shore.

P. 51, l. 803, *A fit of the old cold anguish?*—It is characteristic of Euripides to throw these sudden lights back on the history of his characters. We never knew before (except perhaps from the Prologue) that Phaedra had had these fits of "cold anguish," or that Theseus had noticed them. Cf. p. 65, where for the first time we have a reference to Theseus' own turbulent youth, and his crime against the Amazon, Hippolytus' mother. And p. 59, where we first hear that Hippolytus fasted and followed Orphic rites.

P. 51, l. 804, *But now arrived we be.*—A lie, to make the avoidance of explanations easier.

Pp. 52 f., ll. 817–851.—The laments of Theseus, though they cannot compensate for the drop of dramatic interest after Phaedra's death, are full of beauty and also of character. They bring out clearly the passionateness of the old hero, and also the way in which he only gradually, and then with increasing emotion, realises his loss.

P. 60, l. 977.—Sinis was a robber slain by Theseus at the Isthmus of Corinth. He tied his victims to the tops of pine-trees, which he had bent to the ground, and, according to Hyginus, sent them flying in the air so that they fell and were killed; as Pausanias rather more intelligibly puts it, he tied them between two pines, which he had bent together, and then let the pines spring back and rack the men asunder. Skiron was another robber in the same neighbourhood; he

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made travellers wash his feet on the top of a cliff—the Skironian Rock (cf. p. 71)—and then kicked them into the sea.

Pp. 60–62, ll. 983 ff., Hippolytus' speech.—The ineffectiveness of this speech is, of course, intentional on the poet's part. The one effective answer for Hippolytus would be to break his oath and tell the whole truth. As it is, he can do nothing but appeal to his known character, and plead passionately against all the inferences that his father has drawn as to his general hypocrisy.

P. 62, l. 1036, *It is enough*.—The Chorus, debarred from announcing the truth, catch at any straws that tell in favour of the truth.

P. 62, l. 1041, *Father, 'tis thy mood that makes me marvel*.—He means, I think, to make Theseus realise that the charge is flatly incredible. "You yourself do not believe that I have done such a thing! I know, and you know, that you do not believe it. If you did, you would kill me on the spot, not go on talking like this."

P. 63, l. 1057, *No prophet's lot*.—A prophet spoke from some "sign" or "lot" which he interpreted. This might be an actual "lot," drawn or cast; or by extension, any other sign, from the flesh of a victim or from the flight of birds

P. 68, l. 1142, *And I, even I*, etc.—The song of this maiden may have given Racine the hint of his additional character, Aricie, the princess whom his Hippolyte loves.

P. 70, l. 1195, *And down the road we henchmen followed*.—They walked or ran beside the chariot, accompanying their master to the frontier. Ancient chariots, when used for travelling, went slowly.

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P. 78, l. 1391, *O breath of heavenly fragrance*, etc.—This and the next line make one doubt whether Artemis was supposed to be visible, or only present as a voice. Cf. p. 16, l. 86, “Though none may see thine eyes.”

P. 80, l. 1420, *My hand shall win its vengeance*.—By causing the death of Adônîs, whom Aphrodite loved. It is noteworthy how Euripides’ latent hatred of the orthodox Olympian gods breaks out even in this passage, otherwise so exquisitely beautiful. The human beings are full of love and mutual forgiveness. The goddess, radiantly lovely as she is and pure with the purity of dawn, still thinks of revenge, and—as appears at her departure—is, in some profoundly tragic sense, unloving: a being to be adored, not to love back. The last consolation of Hippolytus is the thought of his perfect devotion to one who in the nature of things can care for him only a little: “I have obeyed Her all my days.”

In the original edition this vase was represented. Hence this reference.

This last scene is one of those passages which show the ultimate falseness of the distinction between Classical and Romantic. The highest poetry has the beauty of both.



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